

## SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

## KEEPING OUR PROMISES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today to remind my colleagues that next Tuesday we will honor our veterans and the sacrifices that they made for our great country.

On Veterans' Day, we will each be back in our districts attending memorial events and letting our constituents know of our admiration for our veterans and our support for American troops currently in battle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What we will not be telling our constituents, however, is that Congress has a history of breaking its promises to these men and women who have fought bravely to defend the values and ideals that this country was founded upon.

When the men and women of our Armed Forces signed up for military duty, the local military recruiting officer told them that, for their service, they would get health care at VA hospitals. What they did not tell them was that they may have to wait up to 6 months for an appointment.

We civilians find it tough enough to get a doctor's appointment through our HMOs. Yet 60,000 veterans have had to wait 6 months or more to get in at a VA hospital. Even worse, 14,000 of America's veterans who are entitled to expedited claims have waited more than 15 months to be seen. To me, there is nothing expedited about a 15-month wait.

This is not the deal we struck with our veterans. They deserve better. We promised members of the military that we will take care of them if they sustained a service-connected disability. We also promised them retirement if they served their country for 20 years. Yet for those veterans who are both retired and disabled, we deduct their disability pay, dollar for dollar, from their retirement pay. What it amounts to is a disability tax on our veterans' pensions.

Can my colleagues imagine a private sector corporation treating its employees this way? Can my colleagues imagine a retiree pension being reduced by the amount of workman's compensation an employee receives? We all know that would never fly in the private sector, but this is how the U.S. Government treats its veterans who have risked their lives and safety defending our country.

Currently, 560,000 disabled military retirees across the Nation are affected

by this disability tax; 65,200 of them are from Texas and 264 reside in the district I represent. These military retirees in my own district lose an average of \$5,310 each in much-needed veterans benefits each year. They fought bravely for our country and earned every penny of these benefits, and we should not be wasting time on half-a-loaf compromises or deals that make veterans wait years for these benefits.

No, our action on concurrent receipt should be driven by the commitment that we made to our veterans who have, without a doubt, upheld their end of the bargain. The sad fact is, this country is not treating our future veterans, the men and women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, any better.

I have no doubt they all appreciate the opportunity to come home for 2 weeks for much deserved rest and relaxation, but I find it unconscionable that we give them a free ride back to a port of entry in the U.S. and then leave them there to pay their own way home. Do we really think an enlisted Army private has the financial resources to pay for a short-notice flight from BWI, Baltimore Airport, to his home or her home? I can guarantee my colleagues we did not ask our men and women in uniform to pay their own way for any leg of their trip to Iraq. We should not be forcing them to pay for any of their trip back home.

This past weekend, the harsh realities of war hit us in Houston particularly hard as we learned that one of our own was aboard the Chinook helicopter bringing 16 of our servicemembers home. Sergeant Keelan Moss graduated only 5 years ago from Eisenhower High School in the Aldine Independent School District. A young man of only 23 years old, he made the ultimate sacrifice for his country and will be forever remembered as an American hero. The loss of his life is a grim reminder of the constant dangers faced by our men and women in uniform.

And while we may often think of our military as a symbol of American strength and pride, we must also remember that it is comprised of individual Americans who are consistently putting their lives on the line, day in and day out, to defend our great Nation.

For their selfless patriotism, we owe it to our military members, both past and present, to keep the promises we made to them. As we send them in harm's way to defend us, that is the least we can do.

## TRIBUTE TO RONALD REAGAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Madam Speaker, it was my pleasure to serve in the Congress of the United States for 6 years when Ronald Reagan was the President of the United States. When

Ronald Reagan became President, the economy was heading in the wrong direction. Early in his administration, we went into a recession which was caused by his predecessor, and he pushed through the Congress very large tax cuts which led to the economic recovery that started the last part of his administration and went on for well over a decade, 14, 15 years.

Ronald Reagan was a very affable man, is a very affable man, was a very kind and generous man, a very understanding man, one who had a big heart and who really cared about America.

Many people in his administration took issue with him when he decided to take on the Soviet Union. When he was about to make his speech talking about the Soviet Union being an evil empire, many people in the State Department cringed and said, my God, Mr. President, you cannot say that. Nevertheless, he did, because the Soviet Union held so many millions of people under bondage, and the captive nations of Eastern Europe applauded what he said.

When he stood before the Berlin Wall and said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall," I remember listening to that and thinking that is a great thing to say, Mr. President; but it will not happen in my lifetime. Yet I was in Namibia when they had the special elections over there, and I went into a German beer garden, and everybody was celebrating. They were raising their steins and dancing, and I said what in the world is going on, and they said do you not know, the Berlin Wall is coming down. The hair on my head and the back of my neck started to rise because I knew that Ronald Reagan got that job done. He raised the stakes against the Soviet Union, with the Soviet Union.

They had 50,000 T-55 tanks that started rusting away because he built up the American defenses so high that they could not keep pace, and their economy could not deal with the problem. So their whole economy started to collapse; and as a result, the Soviet Union collapsed. So Ronald Reagan, when he was President, brought this economy back from the ashes of disaster to where it went on for years and years and years in the right direction. He destroyed, I believe personally, the Soviet Union, along with Lech Walesa and the Pope, by putting pressure on the Soviet Union and Mr. Gorbachev and his predecessors until they just fell apart.

So I was very, very disappointed when I saw that CBS was going to do a miniseries denigrating this great President, this great man, especially at a time when he cannot defend himself. He is suffering from Alzheimers; and his beautiful wife, Nancy Reagan, whom I had a chance to get to know a little bit when she was in the White House, has to live with these horrible things that are being said about her husband, and she cannot do anything about it.